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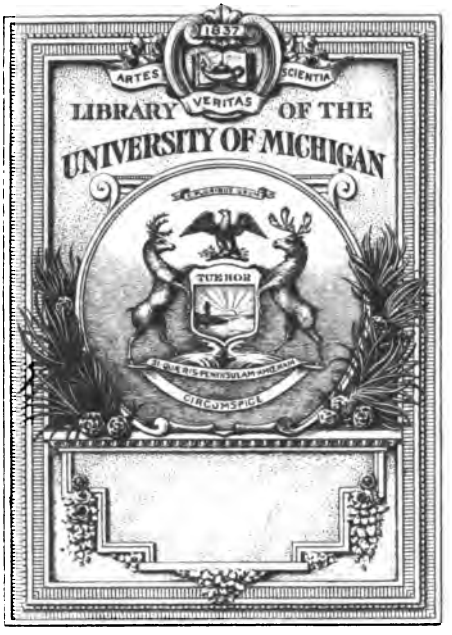


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Makers
Syracuse, N. Y.
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# THE MERCHANDISING OF AUTOMOBILE PARTS AND ACCESSORIES

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# THE MERCHANDISING OF AUTOMOBILE PARTS AND ACCESSORIES

By

CHARLES COOLIDGE PARLIN

Manager, Division of Commercial Research

THE CURTIS PUBLISHING COMPANY

THE LADIES' HOME JOURNAL
THE SATURDAY EVENING POST
THE COUNTRY GENTLEMAN

Philadelphia, 1915

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# Foreword

More than $2,000,000 a year is invested in advertising space in THE SATURDAY EVENING POST, by manufacturers of automobiles and accessories. THE LADIES' HOME JOURNAL and THE COUNTRY GENTLEMAN also contain a considerable amount of automobile advertising.

In order to ascertain whether this important source of business was one which would continue, and also in the desire to be of constructive service to the industry as a whole, the publishers of these periodicals made an extensive study of selling conditions in the automobile field.

A year was devoted to this work. During that time representatives of the Division of Commercial Research interviewed 262 manufacturers and 619 distributors and dealers, located in every part of the country—traveling for this purpose an aggregate of more than 43,000 miles.

The results of the investigation, when compiled, comprised 2500 typewritten sheets, charts, maps, statistical tables, etc., incorporated in four volumes. Copies of these volumes are on file in the offices of The Curtis Publishing Company.

Since the completion of the report, about one hundred conferences have been held with manufacturers of automobiles and accessories for the purpose of explaining and discussing the conclusions in such way as to make the work of service to the industry.

There have also been many requests that this material in some way be made available in printed form.

In response to these requests, some portions which may be of particular interest have been outlined briefly in several pamphlets, of which this is the third. The titles of the others appear on the next page.

THE CURTIS PUBLISHING COMPANY.



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A complete copy of the Automobile Report may be seen at any one of the branch offices of the advertising department of this Company:

1 Madison Avenue, New York City.
Home Insurance Building, Chicago, Ill.
Independence Square, Philadelphia, Pa.
Merchants National Bank Building, Boston, Mass.
First National Bank Building, San Francisco, Cal.

We have also published:

The Merchandising of Automobiles

The Merchandising of Commercial Motor Vehicles.

Additional copies of these pamphlets may be obtained by writing to any of our offices.



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# SECTION I

# Parts and Accessories Sold Wholly or Chiefly to Manufacturers

## Concentration in Motor Car Industry

The number of automobile manufacturers seems likely to be reduced from 130 to about 30 or 40.

From a manufacturing standpoint there is the same tendency to concentration in the automobile industry as in other industries. Many companies have started, but few can survive.

From a retail standpoint, the strong companies and the strong dealers are gravitating together for purposes of mutual self-interest. In almost every important city of the United States the same companies have the strong dealers. This means that the number of companies that can secure adequate retail representation is strictly limited.

Viewed from either a manufacturing or a retail standpoint, the opportunity seems limited to about thirty or forty makes of cars. How will this concentration affect manufacturers of automobile parts?

## Buyers' Position Strengthened

The parts maker who must sell his product to motor-car companies will find that as the number of possible customers grows smaller, and each takes a larger percentage of his output, the buyer's position will be strengthened.

Each customer becomes more essential. It is not so easy to say to the buyer, "Take it or leave it," and the buyer, realizing this, becomes more insistent in his demands. Besides, the customer, since he now buys in



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# A Comparative Table Showing Saving in Buying Parts

| | Manufacturer of Automobiles | | | | Manufacturer of Parts | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| NO. OF PARTS | COST | | SAVING | | COST | | PROFIT | |
| | per part | total | per part | total | per part | total | per part | total |
| 5,000 | $24 | $120,000 | | | $18 | $90,000 | $6 | $30,000 |
| 15,000 | 20 | 300,000 | $4 | $60,000 | 16 | 240,000 | 4 | 60,000 |
| 30,000 | 18 | 540,000 | 2 | 60,000 | 15 | 450,000 | 3 | 90,000 |
| 50,000 | 16 | 800,000 | 2 | 100,000 | 14.50 | 725,000 | 1.50 | 75,000 |
| 75,000 | | | | | | | No profit | |



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larger quantities, feels that as a quantity buyer he is entitled to lower prices and special concessions.

## The Parts Maker Threatened

Thus it has come about that the rapid development of big buyers threatens the manufacturing profits of parts makers, as is illustrated by the chart on the opposite page, which is based on data furnished by a leading manufacturer.

When the parts maker made 5000 parts for a manufacturer he made a profit of $6 per part, or a total of $30,000. When he made 15,000 parts for this same manufacturer his profit per part was reduced to $4, but his total profits increased to $60,000. When he produced 30,000 parts, his profit per part was still further reduced, but his total profits increased to $90,000. But when the parts maker sold a single manufacturer 50,000 parts his total profit fell to $75,000. That is, the parts maker made less total profits when he sold 50,000 parts than when he sold 30,000.

## Selling Below Cost

"But how can a parts maker afford to sell so large an order at so small a profit?" was asked of a motor-car manufacturer.

"The parts manufacturer," was the reply, "is in the position of the man who sold ham at half a cent a pound less than it cost him, but made it up on the rest of his groceries."

"But where are the rest of the groceries?"

"Those," was the reply, "are the small manufacturers."

## The Parts Maker Cannot Stop Manufacture

The parts maker has built factories and created overhead expenses which can be met only by large volume



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production. He cannot afford to reject the contract from the automobile manufacturer who has a large order. He must keep his wheels turning, even though there is no real profit in the order.

## Parts Maker Sells Out to Automobile Manufacturer

"But suppose the automobile manufacturer demanded 75,000 parts instead of 50,000. What would the parts maker do about it?" the manufacturer was asked.

"He would offer to sell out to the motor-car company," was the reply.

The parts maker today faces a shrinking margin of profit that threatens to disappear. The tendency, if carried to its logical conclusion, means for the parts maker dissolution of his business or absorption by a successful buyer. Is there any escape from the tendency?

## A Danger and an Opportunity

The parts maker has today an opportunity, as well as a danger. He can acquaint the consumer with his product and through a consumer demand can insure the permanence of his business.

The consumer wants quality. The great bulk of purchasers may not feel able to pay the price for that last touch of finish or style that contributes to pride of ownership; but the great mass of purchasers in all lines of merchandise is demanding quality that will give satisfactory service. Therefore, the manufacturer who produces a superior product has a sound foundation on which to build a permanent merchandising structure.

## Consumer Studies Parts

Granting the superiority of his product, a parts manufacturer can secure consumer attention. The man who buys a motor car is buying it usually for pleasure,

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and in anticipation of the joy of ownership he delights to read about every part of his new car.

What, for example, could be more prosaic than axles and bearings? And yet today there is a definite demand for certain well-known makes of axles and bearings.

The testimony of dealers is conclusive as to the effectiveness of parts advertising.

If the part demanded is one of prime importance, a single unsatisfactory part may lose the automobile manufacturer his sale. With less important parts the customer may be willing to accept one, or perhaps two, that are not exactly what he desires. If three parts are not up to standard, as a dealer expressed it, "the customer is likely to drive away."

## A Customer Lost

Now, a dealer can get only a certain amount of a prospect's attention. If he has to take time to sell the prospect an unknown starting system, an unknown axle, an unknown speedometer, by the time he has finished this task he has lost the consumer's attention without having had a chance to sell him the car. From a dealer's standpoint, therefore, it is advantageous to have a car with advertised parts, in order that, promptly receiving the consumer's approval on the individual parts, he may be able to focus his attention on the characteristic merits of the car.

## How a Purchaser Judges a Car

A consumer is likely to judge an entire car by the merit of those parts with which he is familiar. If in those parts to which he has given attention a good car measures up to a high standard, he is apt to infer that every part of the car is of the same quality. Hence, those parts which are the subject of advertising are from a sales standpoint relatively more important than unadvertised parts.



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## The Manufacturer's Advantage

In cars selling for $900 or more the problem for the motor-car manufacturer is not primarily manufacture, but sales. The supply has caught up with the demand—some cars are likely to remain unsold at the end of the season and sales competition among manufacturers is keen. Hence, the manufacturer cannot afford to neglect any selling advantage, and if a part, through its merit and the strength of its advertising, has a definite consumer demand, he cannot, for the saving of an inconsequential sum, afford to substitute an unknown part.

## The Price Maker Sets the Standard in Non-Advertised Parts

In the sale of parts in which national advertising is not used, the price maker sets the standard. Since the consumer has no knowledge of excellence in such parts, the manufacturer is free to select the cheapest part that will "get by," and the parts maker who can produce at the lowest price an article that will measure up to the minimum standard required by the automobile manufacturer is the one likely to receive the contract. Anyone else who wishes to compete in this field will need to bring his price, and therefore his quality, down to the standard of the price maker, with constantly decreasing profits.

## The Quality Maker Sets the Standard in Advertised Parts

On the other hand, in the sale of those parts in which one or more producers are using national advertising, the quality producer sets the standard. For the consumer is informed as to who makes the quality article and demands this make. Anyone who wishes to compete with the advertiser must approximate his standard of quality and acquire an equal prestige through advertising; for a noticeably inferior quality will be almost unsalable at

any price; and even a good quality will not be acceptable until the consumer is convinced of its merits.

## Two Groups of Parts Makers Contrasted

Parts makers, then, are likely to be divided into two clearly defined groups:

1. A non-advertising group of parts makers, characterized by price competition, which means inevitably a narrowing margin of profit, threatening the dissolution or absorption of the companies.

2. An advertising group distinguished by quality manufacture, with a consumer knowledge and demand for particular makes which will enable the manufacturers to retain a reasonable margin of profit and maintain their independence.

## "If I Advertise Can I Get a Higher Price?"

"But," says the manufacturer, "if I advertise can I get a higher price for my part than my competitors get?" Perhaps, for the consumer is usually willing to pay an increased price for a superior article, and if the manufacturer has a superior article and convinces the consumer of that fact, he may get some advantage in price over a competitor.

## The Advantages of the Advertiser

But there are other advantages besides price which the advertising parts maker can secure:

1. He can set the standard of quality for the manufacture of his part and the others will have to measure up to his standard.

2. His price being equal to that of his competitors, he can always have his choice of the market, which means that he can take that portion of the market in which the credit risks are best.

3. He can take as much of the market as he wishes.



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## Where the Profits Are

In most manufacturing enterprises the profits of the business are found in the last 25 per cent of the business. The first 75 per cent must take care of overhead and fixed charges. Not until that point has been passed does the manufacturer begin to make an actual net profit, and the struggle is always to carry the volume past that point.

The total volume of business in any automobile part is for any year a fixed quantity, depending absolutely upon the number and kind of motor cars built. The maker of an essential part does not need to create a market for the part. His problem is to get enough of the existing market to enable him to manufacture at a profit.

Prices and quality being equal, the maker of an advertised part has the preference, and hence the advertising parts maker, at the same price as his competitors, may take whatever part of the market he desires. Hence, by gaining the opportunity to take, in the first place, as much of the market as he needs, and, in the second place, that portion of the market in which the credit risks are best, he may be fully compensated for the expense of advertising, even though no advantage in price is received.

## Will Automobile Manufacturers Become Independent of Parts Makers?

But as automobile manufacturers grow larger and stronger, will they not become more independent of advertised parts makers and more able to sell cars on their own recommendation alone?

If it were possible for an automobile manufacturer to gain unquestioned supremacy in his grade of cars, and so to entrench himself that his position would be unassailable, he no doubt would become independent of the advertised parts. But the automobile involves the style

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element. It is the traveling advertisement of a man's position in his community. Few people see a man's furniture or his draperies; everyone sees his automobile. Hence, the motor car expresses in a unique way the man's personality, and just as there are different personalities so there must be a variety of cars in each class. Hence, in every class there must be several competitors, and since these competitors must continue to vie with each other for the possession of a style market which may favor now one and now another, a manufacturer of automobiles cannot safely neglect any sales advantage.

## A Competitor's Opportunity

If, for example, the leader in his class eliminates all advertised parts and sells a car on his own name alone, that will offer an opportunity for the competitors in his class to make effective selling argument of the fact that they have certain parts which the consumers believe to have superiority. Wherever sales competition among automobile manufacturers is keen, every sales advantage will be eagerly sought; and the parts manufacturer who, by the superiority of his product and the strength of his national advertising, secures a definite consumer demand, will find a market for his output.

## An Extension of the Market

Below the $900 mark the problem today is not sales, but manufacture. The lower one goes in price, the more important relatively the mechanical efficiency and the less important the style features. But even in the lowest grade of car there are many possible purchasers who do feel that their car represents their individuality in something the same way that their clothes do. There is, therefore, a demand for a variety of low-priced cars and this demand has not as yet been fully met. Hence, at the



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present time the manufacturer producing cars of less than $900 in value is able to move his product without using advertised parts. But the supply is rapidly catching up with the demand all the way down the price scale, and as the problem in the lower grades of cars comes to be along the line of sales rather than production, the market for advertised parts which are definitely demanded by consumers is likely to be extended to that field.

## The Parts Manufacturer's Dilemma

On the one hand, therefore, the parts manufacturer faces a serious danger; on the other, he has a great opportunity. He is today standing at the parting of the ways:

1. Either he must accept a diminishing margin of profit, which is likely to end ultimately in control or absorption by an automobile concern.

2. Or he must obtain a consumer demand that will induce the automobile maker to prefer his particular product.

## Two Classes of Parts Makers

It therefore seems probable that during the next five years there will be a considerable readjustment among parts manufacturers, and that two fairly distinct groups will evolve:

1. Those that are backed by consumer good will. These will be independent and prosperous.

2. Those that do not have consumer good will. These will tend to be eliminated or absorbed.



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## SECTION II

# Accessories Sold Both to Manufacturers and to Consumers

### Accessories Sold Chiefly to Manufacturers

Originally cars were sold "unequipped," but gradually motor-car manufacturers added equipment, and certain accessories that seldom needed to be replaced, such as lamps and wind shields, were obliged to seek their markets almost exclusively through motor-car manufacturers. The makers of these accessories face today substantially the same situation as that of the parts makers discussed in Section I of this pamphlet.

Makers of accessories sold to manufacturers must either sell on price competition with a constantly shrinking margin of profit and face extinction, or they must through national advertising create a consumer demand.

### Accessories Sold Partly to Consumers

Makers of other accessories for which re-orders are frequent, such as tires and spark plugs, found with the growth of the industry that the consumer market presented the major opportunity, but that sales to manufacturers also offered an important market.

As the number of manufacturers decreased, and each took a larger share of the output, the sales problem assumed new aspects. On the one hand, the large manufacturer insisted on price concessions. On the other hand, the manufacturers' market offered an increased outlet for factory surplus and also offered advertising opportunity.

Hence, it was natural that prices to manufacturers should tend to fall to cost of production, and that the market to the consumers should be made to carry most, if not all, of the margin of profit.



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So far as their sales to manufacturers are concerned, the accessory manufacturers have the same problems as the parts makers, which are discussed in Section I; and so far as their sales to consumers are concerned the problems are identical with those of manufacturers selling chiefly to consumers, and these problems are discussed in Section III of this pamphlet.

## Different Problems With One Solution

But while in many respects these two sets of problems are radically different, in one respect they are alike. The only solution for a permanent and prosperous business in either, is in producing a superior product and in convincing the consuming public of that superiority through national advertising; for, all other things being equal, the advertised product always is the one selected.

## SECTION III

# Accessories and Supplies Sold to Consumers

### Five Classes

Automobile accessories and supplies, viewed from a merchandising standpoint, fall into five distinct classes: Car equipment, tires, lubricating oils, fuel, and sundries. Failure to recognize that the merchandising problems of these classes are distinct has probably been the cause of many retail and jobbing failures.

### A Revolution

Originally all these lines sought their outlet through jobbing channels, but important changes took place:

1. Manufacturers began to equip their cars, and those articles of car equipment which did not require frequent replacement, such as lamps and windshields, almost disappeared from the jobbing trade.

2. Large tire manufacturers, finding the problems of adjustment difficult, established branch houses, and the jobber was compelled to abandon the line or to take the sales agency for a minor tire company. Thus a second important line was largely lost to the jobber.

3. Lubricating oils were found to be too heavy for indirect shipments and the producers began to sell direct to large garages. Jobbing of oils, except within narrow bounds, tended to change to a brokerage basis or to give way to direct factory sales. Thus the third important line deserted the jobber.

4. Fuel was supplied by the Standard Oil Company through its own extensive sales system, and independent companies also sought direct channels to the retailers.



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5. Automobile sundries alone remained, and the jobbing of accessories seemed threatened with utter destruction; but jobbing in sundries could not disappear, for in the distribution of automobile small wares the jobber performed a necessary function, and fortunately the automobile industry grew so rapidly that the increased volume of business in sundries compensated in part at least for the loss of the more important items.

## Jobbing Retarded

Jobbers suffered, not so much from an actual decline in business as from lack of opportunity to expand as did other factors in the industry. The development of large companies was retarded and jobbing has remained in the hands of relatively small concerns, few of whom are able to merchandise effectively their own brands.

## Retailing Also Revolutionized

Retailing went through the same evolution. The sale of windshields and other car equipment was lost, the business in tires had to be divided with branch houses and innumerable selling agencies, while price cutting destroyed the profits. Lubricating oils, fuel and other daily supplies were captured by the garages, and only sundries remained on which the exclusive dealer could build a profitable business.

## Jobbers and Retailers Identical

As a matter of fact, retailing and jobbing are simply two activities of the same individual. The distinction between jobbers and retailers is less clearly drawn in automobile accessories and supplies than in other industries. Exclusive jobbers of automobile sundries hardly exist. Most large jobbers maintain retail establishments and most large retailers job to garages.



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## Characteristics of Jobbing and Retailing of Automobile Sundries

This jobber-retailer, today, finds himself in possession of a rapidly changing business that requires alert attention.

1. The number of articles is large, a catalogue of an automobile supply house listing about 1000 articles. Stock changes are rapid, for a thing in demand today may be obsolete tomorrow, either because something mechanically superior is invented or because style has changed.

2. Prices are constantly being altered to meet rapidly changing competitive conditions and stocks must be kept as low as possible.

3. The use of telegrams, telephones and express probably exceeds that of any other retail business except that of perishable fruits; for the consumer who wants an article wants it immediately and no one is carrying any considerable stock.

## The Dealer Prefers Nationally Advertised Lines

It is obvious that the jobber and retailer must stock only those goods that will move quickly. They cannot afford to attempt the exploitation of private brands. In the first place, they cannot afford the time; for there are a multitude of other details that demand attention. In the second place, articles grow obsolete so fast that before the market for a private brand article can be developed something newer has replaced it and the dealer's efforts have been wasted.

Hence exploitation of brands devolves on the manufacturer who can use the quick, powerful and relatively inexpensive machinery of national publicity.

Probably in no line is national advertising more essential than in automobile sundries. If one asks a jobber whether he prefers nationally advertised lines, he



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scarcely understands the question; for he finds it difficult to believe that anyone would make so foolish an inquiry. Of course he prefers nationally advertised lines.

## Founded on National Advertising

The merchandising of automobile supplies, as of motor cars themselves, was founded on national advertising. Automobiles being of recent creation, dealers were hampered by no traditions and naturally adopted the most modern and efficient merchandising methods. Hence the jobbers and retailers of automobile supplies never debate the question of private brands. When a manufacturer's agent comes with a new article the jobber says, "Get your article well known. Then we will stock it."

## Advertising an Accessory

The manufacturer of an automobile accessory bought by consumers needs the power of national advertising and needs to apply it with sufficient power and concentration to produce quick returns; for the life of the article may be brief. The market for accessories is a mobile market, alert for newer and better things; and relatively small advertising, if efficiently used, will attract attention and create a demand, enabling the manufacturer to cash in on his opportunity before some newer invention may render his article obsolete.

## Advertising a Line of Accessories

The industry is the creation of a decade and there is little wonder that that decade is filled with kaleidoscopic changes; but as the industry matures, changes will be less frequent and less violent, and there are likely to emerge a comparatively few large producers of accessories, who will keep abreast of style demands and whose names will stand for quality.

Hence there is an opportunity for a manufacturer of accessories not merely to exploit an article and cash in on its fleeting sales, but by a consistent advertising policy to establish a reputation for a brand that shall be a guarantee to the consumer of superior quality and of up-to-date design on whatever articles it is used, and thus to build a reputation that may be a permanent and valuable asset of the firm.

## Advertising Automobile Supplies

In the purchase of any supplies that are subject to frequent reorder, customers develop buying habits; for any oft-repeated act tends to become automatic and is executed without much thought or attention. So it is with the purchase of supplies that are bought frequently. Before the habit is formed the purchaser is easily influenced by suggestion; when once the habit is formed he unconsciously resists new influences.

Years ago certain household supply manufacturers by national advertising preempted important markets. Today it would take millions to buy their trade-marks and still more millions to wrest from them their markets.

Today buying habits are being formed in the purchase of oils and other automobile supplies, and the manufacturer who attracts consumer attention while it is still alert, and by the superiority of his product and the persistence of his national advertising attaches that market to himself, is not only laying the foundation for a permanent and important business, but also he may secure the domination of a field and successfully entrench himself against future assaults of competitors.

## Advertising Possibilities of Parts, Accessories and Supplies

While there are marked variations in method in the sale of parts, accessories and supplies, depending on



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whether they are sold to the manufacturer or to the consumer, whether they are bulky or light, whether bought a single time or repeatedly, they are all alike in one fundamental respect: their success depends absolutely upon consumer demand; and the basis of any merchandising plan should be publicity that will acquaint the consumer with the merit of the product.

## Foundation for Merchandising

While the merchandising problems of parts, accessories and supplies in many of their details are complex and difficult, in advertising they are comparatively simple. A strong, logical, concentrated appeal to the consumer in those publications that will best carry conviction of quality is the essential foundation for merchandising.

# ADVERTISING PARTS AND ACCESSORIES

**The power of THE SATURDAY EVENING POST in the automobile field is illustrated by the charts which follow.**

To the manufacturer of parts or accessories, it should be obvious that THE POST is the logical medium of advertising.

The sale of parts and accessories depends upon demand from the consumer.

THE POST has long since demonstrated that it is unexcelled as an engine for creating demand from the consumer.

Particularly in the automobile field.

More than sixty per cent of all national periodical advertising in the automobile classifications appears in THE POST.

*Where more effectively could automobile parts and accessories be advertised than in the very medium which dominates in the advertising of the complete automobile itself?*

THE CURTIS PUBLISHING COMPANY
INDEPENDENCE SQUARE
PHILADELPHIA



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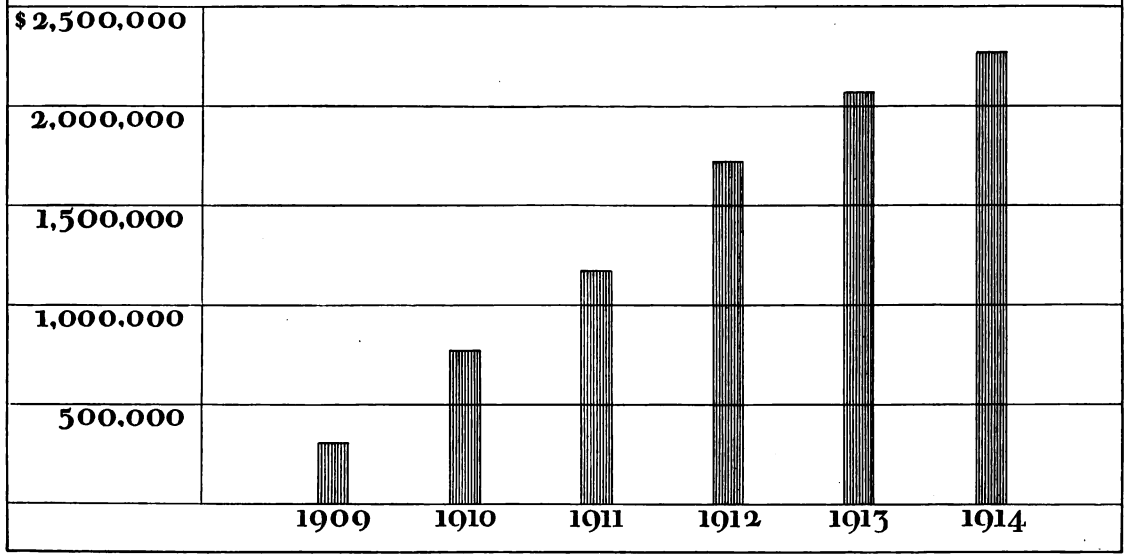
## GROWTH *of* AUTOMOBILE, TIRE *and* ACCESSORY ADVERTISING *in* THE SATURDAY EVENING POST

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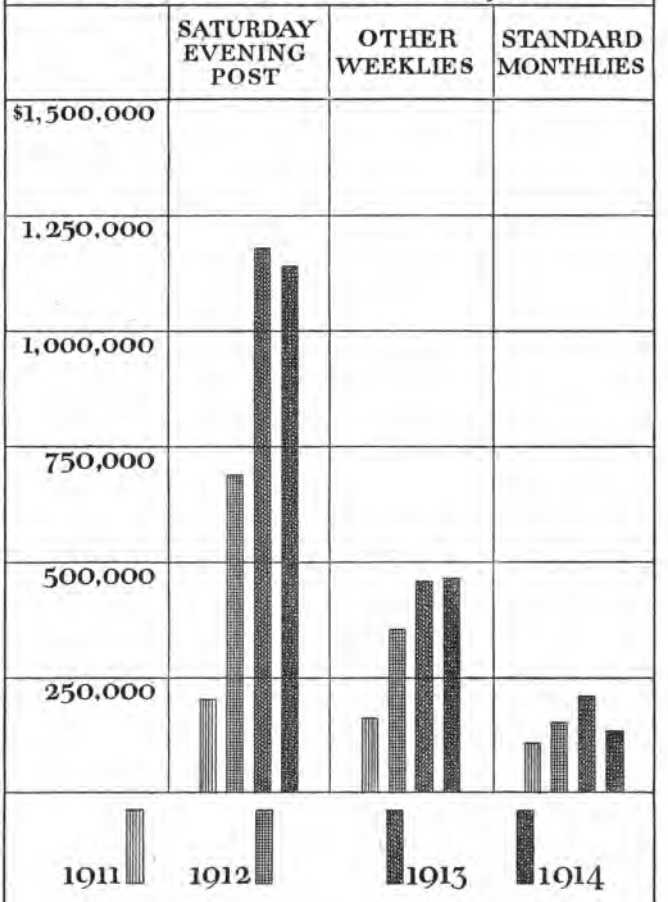
## ADVERTISING *of* PARTS *and* ACCESSORIES, *Including Tires*




| | |
|---|---|
| SATURDAY EVENING POST | 65 % |
| OTHER WEEKLIES | 27 % |
| STANDARD MONTHLIES | 8 % |



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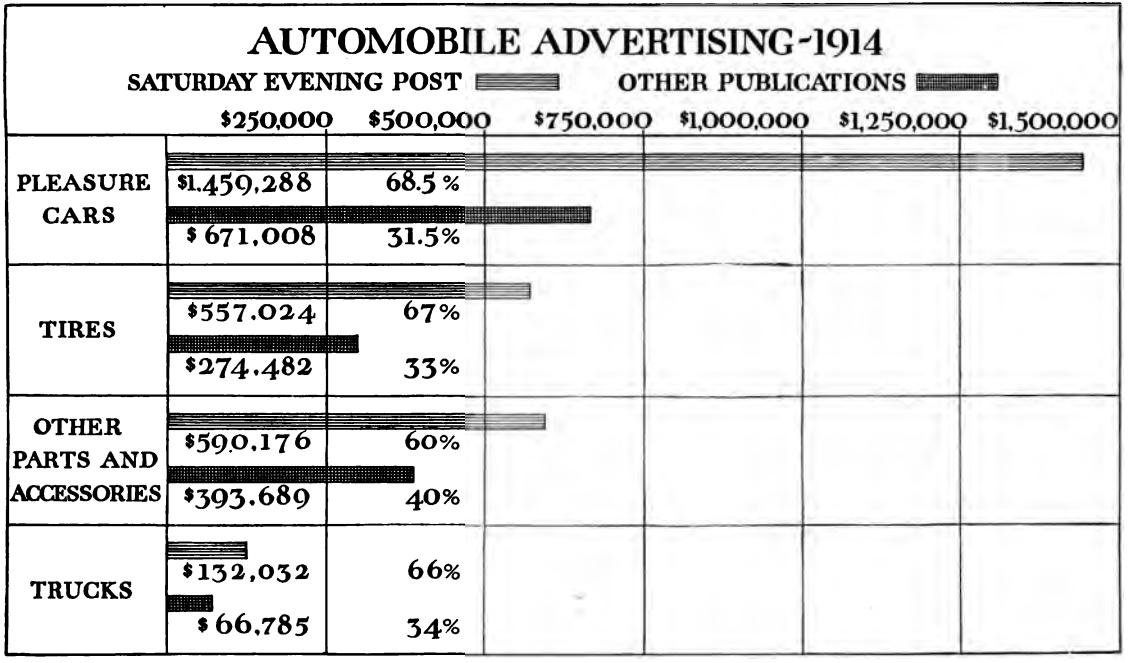
AUTOMOBILE ADVERTISING-1914
SATURDAY EVENING POST
OTHER PUBLICATIONS
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$500,000
$750,000
$1,000,000
$1,250,000
$1,500,000
PLEASURE CARS
$1,459,288
68.5 %
$ 671,008
31.5%
TIRES
$557,024
67%
$274,482
33%
OTHER PARTS AND ACCESSORIES
$590,176
60%
$393,689
40%
TRUCKS
$132,032
66%
$ 66,785
34%